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11 September 1956

COMMENTS ON SVALBARD

1. In accordance with an international agreement signed at the Conference in Sevres in 1920 by the then interested powers and adhered to in 1935 by the USSR, Svalbard is a possession of Norway. The treaty provides that no military installations of any kind will be allowed on the islands and that foreign nationals, under regulations set forth by the Norwegian Government, will be granted concessions for the economic exploitation of coal and other resources. The USSR is currently taking advantage of this arrangement. The British also have concessions but are not actively exploiting them. Shortly before the end of World War II when Norway was in a position to be intimidated by the Soviet army of "liberation," Moscow demanded outright cession of Bear Island and the establishment of a condominium with Norway over the archipelago in place of the existing treaty agreements. These proposals were rejected by the Norwegian Storting, and the issue has not been raised again by the USSR.

Svalbard is strategically important because it is situated on the great circle route from northern Russia to Greenland and the east coast of the U.S. It includes potential airfield sites, guided-missile emplacements, weather and Loran stations, and radar posts within 700 miles of Murmansk and 480 miles from the northernmost part of Norway. For a few months of a year it could be used by any Western Power as a

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destroyer and emergency submarine base, thus simplifying the task of surveillance of Soviet submarines.

In the event of a conflict, the international status of Svalbard would be of merely theoretical importance. Norway would probably neither be willing nor able to remain neutral, and the outcome would then depend upon who took the initiative in suddenly establishing themselves militarily on the islands. Any forces there would, if necessary, be maintained by bringing in supplies by air. Precedent, if it be needed, was supplied by the German occupation of the islands during World War II.

The Soviet Union has invested heavily in exploration within its concession area. They have tried to extend their holdings to Prince Karl Island and have offered to buy from Norway, at almost any price, the Svea mine at Bellsund. Doubts have repeatedly been expressed about the activities of Soviet personnel on the islands and the accuracy of their coal production and export figures. Soviets have refused to grant to the Norwegian mining inspector the right of free and unimpeded entrance into and examination of the mines required by the treaty. However, the condition of the mining equipment and the appearance of the Soviet "miners" (who greatly outnumber the Norwegian miners) lead to the almost universal acceptance of the idea that the mines are being used to store military equipment which would be needed in the event of a conflict and that vessels coming to the mining concession are more heavily loaded than those leaving, which are supposedly loaded with coal. There is, therefore, the obvious danger that the Soviets already possess

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the manpower and equipment needed to take over at any time. Details of the Soviet installation and manpower at each are available in G/E-64, March 1957.

2. Before establishing a U.S. base on Svalbard the major legal obstacles presented by the 1920 Treaty would first have to be circumvented. The next obstacle would be the physical problems involved. Initial study of the peninsula would be possible from available maps and aerial photographs. It is believed that complete photo coverage is already accessible in Washington should it be needed for this purpose.

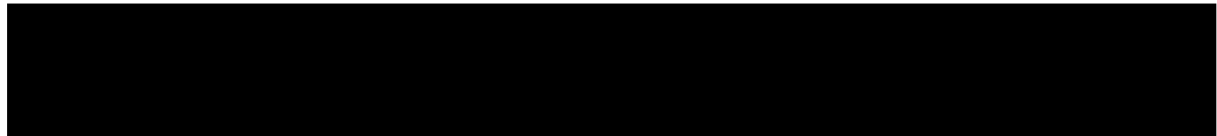
No airfields have been established in Svalbard. Potential landing sites are limited to those fjords where deltas have been formed at the mouths of the rivers and to a few narrow belts of level land along the coast. Elsewhere, mountain ranges rise precipitously almost from the shore. There are, however, several natural sites that, with slight preparation, could be used for landing light and medium aircraft during the summer and early fall (August-October); but they would be unusable during the period of maximum thaw (June-July). Considerable engineering work would be required to build a field suitable for anything more than occasional use, and the hazard of frost-heave damage would have to be overcome. The Germans used a natural field of the type described above to land JU-88's, ME-111's, and JU-52's during World War II.

Reindeer Peninsula has been mentioned as possessing excellent potential for the construction of an air strip. One major drawback is the shallow surrounding water, which does not permit use by large ships. Consequently lighters would have to be used to land heavy equipment.

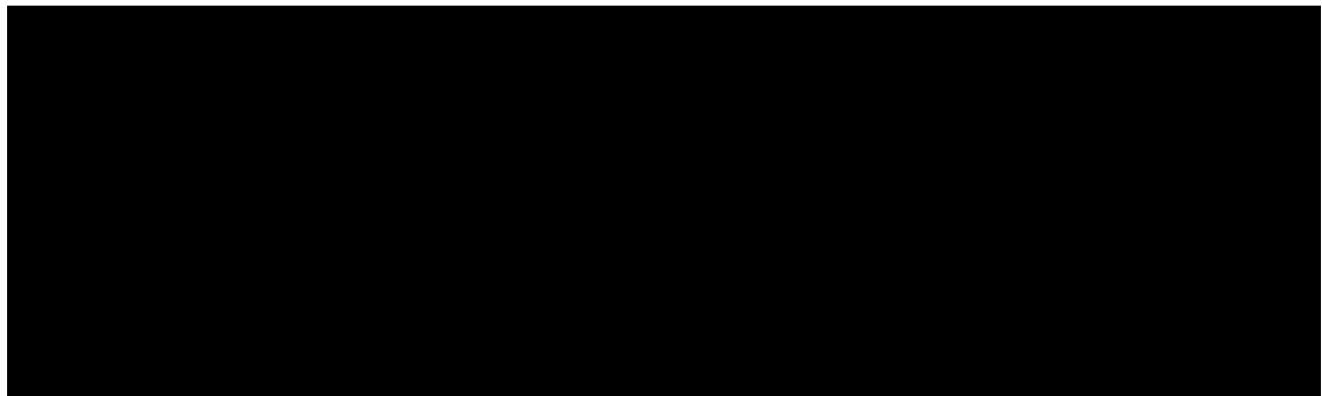
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This area is also more subject to fog conditions than other parts of Svalbard. Several additional areas -- such as Die Dje Flats, on a peninsula in the northwest and the southern tip of Prince Karl Foreland -- are also potential sites for air strips. The nearly level land and the presence of large gravel supplies have led some experts to consider Prince Karl Foreland the most favorable site for an overt airfield.



Regardless of which site were chosen for an airfield, it can be presumed that the necessary grading of the land or its use as a landing strip would not pass unnoticed. In addition to fairly frequent boat connections, the Soviets on Svalbard maintain communication with the mainland by seaplane. They also undoubtedly fly numerous military reconnaissance trips over the area. A Swedish-Finnish Geophysical Year Station located on Murchisonfjord and a Polish station on Svalbard are supplied by air and sea.



Of the five ports on Svalbard, only Longyearbyen and Barentsburg have alongside berthing facilities capable of accommodating small ocean-going cargo vessels. Ny Alesund, Pyramiden, and Grumantbyen afford fairly sheltered

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